
THE SALAMANDER ROOM

Author: Anne Mazer

Illustrator: Steve Johnson

Publisher: Random House

THEME:

An animal habitat must provide what the animal needs to live.

PROGRAM SUMMARY:

A young boy finds a salamander and thinks of the many things he can do to make a perfect home for it.

Viewers learn that there is more to creating an animal habitat than meets the eye as LeVar explores Jungle World, a rain forest environment created at the Bronx Zoo in New York, and they learn about scientists who use a treetop raft as a lab to study the rain forest ecosystem.

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION:

Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of Brian's plan to have the salamander live in his room.

Ask the students to think about how well the salamander might survive in its new environment in Brian's room. Discuss problems that might arise when people take a wild animal out of its natural habitat and try to make a pet of it.

Discuss the fantasy and reality elements of the story with students. Which of the things Brian said he would do to create a habitat for the salamander would really be plausible? Lead students to the understanding that there is scientific information even within the fantasy elements.

Invite students to envision their own ideal environment. Where is it? What do they feel are their basic necessities? What additional items are needed to enhance their comfort? After students have shared their ideas, discuss how everyone's "ideal" is not the same.

CURRICULUM EXTENSION ACTIVITIES:

Identify several animals that represent different habitats, such as desert, rain forest, ocean, forest, polar region, wetlands, mountain, etc. Have students, working with a partner, select an animal to research. Prepare an information sheet for students to complete, including the name of the animal, where it lives, what it eats, and a fact about the animal that helps to explain why it is well suited to its habitat. Leave space at the top of the page for the students to draw a picture of the animal in its habitat. Display the pages, grouped by habitat.

Obtain a copy of the book to read to students. Brainstorm a list of all the things Brian said he would bring into his room (e.g., leaves, moss, crickets, etc.) and changes he said he would make to accommodate the growing habitat (e.g., lift off the ceiling). Write this list on one side of a two-sided chart. Using a different color of marker on the second side of the chart, write how each of the items would be used (e.g., the leaves for a bed, the moss for a pillow, the crickets to sing the salamander to sleep, etc.). These lists could also be transferred to sentence strips written in two different colors for students to match.

Have students research salamanders. What kind of salamander did Brian find? What other kinds of salamanders are shown in the illustrations? What animals are "relatives" of salamanders?

The story of *The Salamander Room* is told through dialogue between Brian and his mother. Adapt the story into a Readers Theater script for two voices. Make copies available for pairs of students to practice reading the story aloud.

Using a map of the world, locate areas where there are tropical rain forests.

Designate a large bulletin board or wall space for a rain forest scene. Have students research the vegetation of the four layers of a rain forest: emergent layer, canopy, understory, and forest floor. Make different kinds of papers available for making the flowers, plants, vines, and trees. Encourage them to experiment with paper folding and cutting techniques that will make the vegetation appear three-dimensional.

Have students research rain forest animals and make drawings of them to put in the scene described above. As part of their research, they will need to determine which layer of the rain forest the animals inhabit. Have students post a "key" to animals, according to layer, where they may be found in the scene. For example, a list of animals that live on the forest floor could be placed next to the scene so that students could search for those animals.

As students begin to learn more about the rain forest, start a list of products that originate in the rain forest. Common products include: rubber, bamboo, chewing gum, vanilla, perfumes and cosmetics, pepper and other spices, cacao, bananas, coffee, different types of nuts, and many others. Items that come from the depletion of the rain forests (e.g., various hard woods) are likely to appear on the list, as well. Use this opportunity to discuss the problems associated with this type of deforestation. Have students start a display of rain forest products by bringing in packaging and locating pictures in magazines.

RELATED THEMES:

ecology
temperate rain forests
amphibians

RELATED READING RAINBOW PROGRAMS:

Program #99 — And Still The Turtle Watched
Program #104 — Once There Was A Tree

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Anne Mazer grew up in upstate New York and described herself as an avid reader of books as a child. She is the author of picture books and collections of essays and stories about the ethnic diversity of Americans. The idea for *The Salamander Room* came on a nature hike when a boy wanted to take a Salamander home.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR:

Steve Johnson began illustrating books in 1989. Many of his critically acclaimed books are collaborations with his wife Lou Fancher, a book designer. They live and work in Minneapolis.

BOOKS REVIEWED BY CHILDREN:

THE GREAT KAPOK TREE: A TALE OF THE AMAZON RAIN FOREST
by Lynne Cherry (Harcourt Brace)

CHIPMUNK SONG
by Joanne Ryder, illus. by Lynne Cherry (Lodestar/Dutton)

FROGS, TOADS, LIZARDS, AND SALAMANDERS
by Nancy Winslow Parker and Joan Richard Wright, illus. by Nancy Winslow Parker (William Morrow)

SUPPLEMENTARY BOOKLIST:

WHERE THE FOREST MEETS THE SEA
by Jeannie Baker (Greenwillow)

RAIN FOREST
by Helen Cowcher (Farrar, Straus & Giroux)

RAIN FOREST BABIES
by Kathy Darling, illus. by Tara Darling (Walker Publishing Co.)

RAIN FOREST SECRETS
by Arthur Dorros (Scholastic)

THE MOON OF THE SALAMANDERS

by Jean Craighead George, illus. by Marlene Hill Werner (HarperCollins)

NATURE'S GREEN UMBRELLA

by Gail Gibbons (Morrow)

TROPICAL RAINFORESTS

by Jean Hamilton (Silver Burdett)

JAGUARUNDI

by Virginia Hamilton, illus. by Floyd Cooper (Blue Sky/Scholastic)

AMAZON ALPHABET

by Tanis Jordan, illus. by Martin Jordan (Kingfisher)

RAIN FORESTS & REEFS: A KID'S-EYE VIEW OF THE TROPICS

by Caitlin Maynard & Thane Maynard, photos by Stan Rullman (Franklin Watts)

WELCOME TO THE GREEN HOUSE

by Jane Yolen, illus. by Laura Regan (Putnam)

